

THE PRAIRIE AT ABERDEEN OPENS THIS WEEKEND

Thoughtful village in prairie setting points the way to housing's future

Have you ever visited new homes on the market and thought, "These are nice, but not exactly what I had in mind"? Have you tromped through brand new residences and come close to perfection – but not quite? Home buyers like you could be in for a real surprise when The Prairie at Aberdeen opens this weekend. The Valparaiso neighborhood and its homes are probably as perfect as any you'll find.

And there are good reasons why. Developers and builders usually try to read the marketplace by watching trends, reading the industry trade journals, and paying attention to what they can fathom of home buyer likes and dislikes. In the case of The Prairie, however, Capstone Development and its two exclusive builders – Charlson Custom Homes and Coolman Communities, Inc. – cut out "the middleman" and went directly to prospective buyers.

It's an interesting story with a happy ending. It started when Capstone Development's Bob Coolman first visited the site of The Prairie and realized what a stunning parcel of land it is. Prairie terrain with native grasses and colorful wildflowers, the site offered ideas of its own.

The next step involved throwing out every preconceived idea about what customers want in a home and asking some real people – a volunteer consultant group of baby boomers who had a wealth of homeowner experience – to design their own "dream home."

This was an involved process – a rebuilding process, literally. There were many steps on the path to what is now the "ultimate baby boomer home." The builders were energized by the ideas their committed consultants brought to the task. The volunteers were amazed not only that the builders listened carefully, but that they accommodated so many of their thoughts in the final plan for the community.

The final step is nearly here. The Prairie at Aberdeen and two brand new homes will be open to the public beginning October 8.

What's so special about The Prairie? Just about everything. Half of the land has been preserved as natural prairie – land the developer will nurture by thwarting invasive species and re-introducing native plants. From the prairie preservation to the siting of homes to the innovative stormwater system, The Prairie points the way toward building which is environmentally rich and ecologically sound.

Fifty four exquisite homes with charming details, clustered around three small village greens, give the streetscape more the ambience of an English village than an ordinary street in an ordinary subdivision. The homes have stunning views of the prairie outside their windows and provide ample opportunity for enjoying its sights, sounds, and aromas year round.

Inside the homes, visitors will see what happens when you let an honest, no-holds-barred group of baby boomers hold sway. Open and airy rooms, large windows, flexible spaces, and adequate storage areas were requirements. Convenience, achieved through multi-purpose features as well as built-ins and niches, is key. For instance, the laundry room in one of the homes has counter and cupboard space that will work not only for folding the bath towels, but wrapping presents and working on crafts.

The baby boomer volunteers informed every phase of the interior design. That's why visitors will see "his and her spaces" (even couples need private places on occasion, the consultants stressed) and large and separate closets.

Bob Coolman, Vic Charlson, and their staffers were an ideal audience for vanguard ideas. Fresh new thinking combined with the builders' experience created a whole new paradigm.

"We wanted our focus group to give it to us straight and they did," Coolman said. "These people were extremely thoughtful and spent a lot of time pondering every aspect of the project."

Frankly, the consultants had lived long enough to see a host of synthetic and surrogate materials, too, and they pressed for substance. In the homes at The Prairie, visitors will see more stone, wood, iron, and glass – and much less that is fabricated or faux.

At The Prairie, the emphasis really is on a serene environment where there's time to stop and smell the wildflowers (or listen to the prairie grasses rustle in the breeze). Landscaping at The Prairie will be different, too. This "ultimate baby boomer home" limits lawns and expands the concept of low-maintenance gardens and walkways. Though retiring couples and baby boomers will thrill to the community, the lower hassle lifestyle will appeal to a broad range of home seekers, including singles and busy young professionals. For the builders and the consultants, the idea of gardens and prairie is preferable to the labor and chemicals associated with grass growing and mowing.

A quiet and separate enclave, it's still just minutes from downtown Valparaiso. Located at the southern end of the Aberdeen community, The Prairie provides fast access to the city's offerings, but also a way to absolutely "get away from it all" – the ideal mix. It also allows homeowners to enjoy the benefits of Aberdeen's walking trails and bike paths, restaurant, swimming pool, and championship 18-hole golf course.

The Prairie promises to be the hot housing find of the year. Imagine a neighborhood where you don't have to buy a lawn mower and you can watch the seasons change in your own private prairie. Where you know your neighbors, but can sit on the deck with a view of bluestem grass and coneflowers in a world of private calm. The collaboration of boomers and builders at The Prairie has resulted in a happy tale, indeed.

DETAILS

The Prairie at Aberdeen will have its Grand Opening from noon to 8 p.m. October 8 through 16. A \$5 admission fee per adult will benefit the Spring Valley Homeless Shelter in Valparaiso. To get to The Prairie, take U.S. Hwy. 30 to State Road 2 and proceed west on SR2 to Division Road. Take Division to the Aberdeen entrance on Tower Road. Continue onto Lockerbie, then Larwick, and look for “The Prairie” signs. For a map and more information, visit www.prairieataberdeen.com. Details are also available by calling Bill McClure (Coolman Communities, Inc.) at 405-8973 or Lindsay Charlson (Charlson Custom Homes) at 464-2745.